

## THE ROLE OF ADVERTISEMENTS IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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### ABSTRACT

The EFL classrooms in the globalised world have been witnessing many changes in terms of the teaching-learning processes. To become a global citizen, the students are expected to complement their studies with the required LSRW skills. The English teachers especially teachers in ESL and EFL classrooms have been meeting this challenge with quite some success. For these purposes, activities in the English classroom have been playing an important role. In this paper, I wish to discuss one such activity, which has the potential to develop the skills of communication especially, speaking and writing skills; in terms of improving their cognitive learning skills which assist them in the acts of interpretation. At the same time it also initiates the students in terms of motivation and creativity thus improving their critical thinking skills. The activity concerns itself with the use of 'advertisements' in the English classroom. A part of 'persuasive discourse', it carries a high impact factor that can affect students in more than one ways. The activity may be used for the intermediate and under-graduate students and can be adjusted according to the levels of their comprehension and reception.

**KEYWORDS:** Activity-Based Learning, Advertisements, Approaches, Stylistic and Literary Analyses

### INTRODUCTION

The EFL classrooms in the globalised world have been witnessing many changes in terms of the teaching-learning processes. To become a global citizen, the students are expected to complement their studies with the required LSRW skills. The English teachers especially teachers in ESL and EFL classrooms have been meeting this challenge with quite some success. The English labs have also helped facilitate the process in better ways. The multimedia, CALL and ICT are also playing a significant role in equipping the teacher and the taught in terms of material for learning, improving and improvising.

Activities in the English classroom have been playing an important role. Including activities in the teaching-learning process benefits the students. (Hanauer: 2001; Maley and Duff :1989). There are many such activities to strengthen the performance of the students. In this paper, I wish to discuss one such activity, which has the potential to develop the skills of communication especially, speaking and writing skills; in terms of improving their cognitive learning skills which assist them in the acts of interpretation. At the same time it also initiates the students in terms of motivation and creativity thus improving their critical thinking skills. The activity concerns itself with the use of 'advertisements' in the English classroom. A part of 'persuasive discourse', it carries a high impact factor that can affect students in more than one ways. The activity may be used for the intermediate and under-graduate students and can be adjusted according to the levels of their comprehension and reception.

### APPROACHES

The debates between language and literature and their importance over each other in the English classroom

continue but many teachers have opted for a fusion of both. This gives the student the benefits of both; language and literature. The combination of the stylistic approach (1) and the reader-response approach (2) can give good results. Through the use of advertisements, students learn stylistic elements like vocabulary, grammar, punctuation and the phonological aspects like pronunciation, stress and intonation. The linguistic analysis helps the teacher to bring them closer to the nuances of language.

The response theory focuses on how the reader reacts to the text or discourse. Davis discusses the potential applications of the theory to foreign language pedagogy. He stressed on the aspect of the process that takes place “during” the reading of the text (1989:423). The advertisement; a creative whole can become a potential tool in lending itself to teaching and learning the concepts of language and literature. The reader-response theory allows for inferences and insights by the reader. It is not a passive acceptance of the text but an active involvement with it. With an advertisement, a student can contemplate and it also gives a chance to the students to explore their emotional responses to the text. At the same time, all the criteria of the theory may not be met, but the method does help the student in internalizing the text to respond and also interpret. The response- theory involves personal response, agreement or disagreement with personal world view, the text’s address to one’s view, reminder of any other text and the over-all reaction to the text. Liaw (2001) has studied the effects of the theory in an EFL class. He opines that “...the use of literature if taught in a response-based manner need not be a vehicle only for language but also for aesthetic experience that enhances the enjoyment of reading in a foreign language.”(43) Most of these aspects are related to the activity in question.

The reader-response theory is usually used for large texts, and an advertisement in any form (still or moving) is a smaller one in size and thought and less time is taken to comprehend it when compared to a larger text. But in spite of this, it is still a form of discourse which is open to many features of language learning. It can always serve to supplement and complement the prescribed texts. Besides, it makes for a good foil to teach some difficult literary devices.

Desuggestopedia is another approach which was introduced by Georgi Lazanov. It bases itself on the physical and mental comfort zones of the student. It also seeks the teacher’s role to be more flexible and different from the usual ‘teacher is the authority’ aspect. One of its aims is to attempt to break the psychological barriers of the students in learning and functioning in a group. It is also associated with music in the classroom and believes in a bright and cheery atmosphere in the classroom. This it believes will stimulate the mental reserves of the students. It expects that the teacher is more positive and humanistic while assisting the students in their learning processes thus applying the principle of ‘suggestion to pedagogy’, which remains the basic theory of ‘desuggestopedia’. Advertisements and commercials can be molded to suit the features of ‘desuggestopedia’. The activity can be carried out in a stress-free environment where the students get a chance to ‘open-up’ and overcome psychological barriers to speaking and writing at least to some extent. The activity facilitates working in a group and this helps the students in shedding their inhibitions.

The advertisement is an integration of visual persuasion coupled with stylistic and literary elements. Not just the verbal but also the non-verbal features of communication can be discussed. Advertisements from newspapers and magazines and commercials are used in the activity. An exciting array of material is available to choose from. One can make use of a computer to show videos of advertisements. The aspects of body language also can be studied by noticing the peoples framed in the advertisement. The brevity, terseness and the catchiness (Smith and Rawley: 1997) of the capsule are an added advantage.

Sites like the one mentioned (<http://www.visit4ads.com/>) (3) and many such sites offer 'downloadable commercials' and help many a teacher in lending resources. Thus advertisements; a part of authentic material help the teachers bring the 'real world' into the classroom. The students find exploring them very attractive.

It suits a mixed-ability class in which the EFL teacher has to adopt various methods of teaching but finally make the student articulate, confident and competent in the target language to face future challenges (4) in a globalized world. It facilitates inductive methods which enhance student participation and this student-centeredness has the potential to result in better student learning and also encourages 'student-autonomy'.

## METHODOLOGY

An advertisement comes as a nugget of opportunities. The content, length, flexibility to recycle the information (if a video is shown), potential to engage the student and the context it offers that serve as a ladder for language learning. The ad writers exploit language by breaking a grammar rule, playing with word meanings and associations. The underlying dynamic of culture can also be discussed. At the same time, advertisements provide an inclusive, friendly and open atmosphere.

Kinneavy's Communication Triangle has the encoder (the speaker/writer), the decoder (audience/reader), reality (the outer world) and the triangle itself which represents the text. If the writer's aim is self-expression, then it is expressive discourse. If the writer's aim is persuading the reader or convincing the reader, then it is persuasive discourse. If the writer's aim is to discuss reality, then the discourse is a presentation of reality and it becomes referential discourse. If the writer intends to give pleasure and the stress is on the internal ordering of the formal characteristics of the message, then it is literary discourse.

(<http://www.sadasae.com/Pages/17%20GS%20Methods%20and%20Purposes.htm>)

Though advertisements are part of 'persuasive discourse', the students can consider them differently also and here lies the strength of this type of discourse. The following are the areas and many more can come up as a result of improvisation.

One way is to distribute cuttings from newspapers or magazines. The students can be given time to prepare. This can also be given as a home-assignment. Then the students can be given a variety of tasks either individually or in groups.

**Vocabulary:** The students can concentrate on the caption if any. They can then form word or vocabulary webs. If they are not given prior time, they can guess the meanings and if they are given time, they can come prepared with meanings. In the classroom, they can try and form more words. And use them. Coinages, compound-words are often found and the students can expand their study about them.

**Grammar:** Usually advertisements come with sentences which focus on word-play and special syntactic structures. These criteria can be used to teach grammatical aspects. The words can also be categorized according to their grammatical function. Punctuation may also be dealt with. The copy-writers innovate with punctuation to catch the attention of the consumers.

A famous company that deals in electronic goods has come up with the caption, "Make. Believe." The structure has a word as a sentence and a period after the word (graphological analysis). This is a special syntactic structure which

has economized on the number of words. It leaves itself open to discussions on grammatical style markers ( the use of present tense), lexical style markers ( the use of positive and commendatory words like ‘make’ and ‘believe’), syntactic style marker ( has just two words with a period after every word and absence of cohesive devices like ‘and’, ‘but’ etc.) and textual analysis ( implications and inferences).

The linguistic entities like foregrounding; (5) (a linguistic method of establishing significance through marking, stressing or contrasting), parallelism (repetition of syntactical structures) and deviation are manipulated by the ad writers and these elements when discussed in the classroom and applied by the students in their creative speech or writing will make their learning process interesting. The ads also offer literary devices and figures of speech like symbol, metaphor, anti-climax, irony, pun and so on. These concepts also can be exploited by the teacher in helping students explore meanings. Some of these areas may be new and difficult for a student in an EFL setting but the teacher’s hidden strategy may include these. Gradually, depending on the capacity of the students, he/she can lead them to these concepts.

### **Co-Construction of Meaning**

**Analysis:** The caption and the vocabulary used can be analyzed by the students. The students can discuss and speak to the class about their analyses. This activity is ‘student to student’ and later ‘student to students and teacher’. This gives them an opportunity to test their speaking skills and presentation skills. It can be molded according to the levels of comprehension and confidence of the student. The process breaks down inhibitions and if the student is unable to speak, he can always take help from his group. Phonological aspects like pronunciation, stress and intonation are also taken into consideration by the teacher.

For example, if the picture has a famous historical monument or one of the wonders of the world, they can think and speak about the place, or about man and architecture. An advertisement which has slogans like “If I became a millionaire” with an inspiring photo of a youth guiding an old lady through a path, it might strike a chord with some and make them reflect upon the higher values of life. Such content also has a capacity to motivate students thus giving their reading a fresh meaning and purpose. Thus communicative contexts are created in which the students feel free to share their ideas.

The students can be grouped and given a similar activity of analysis for an exercise in writing. As they have already been briefed about the special usages of language, they can try to embed it into their analyses. They can also be encouraged to give their own captions. Each group comes up with its slogan and discusses its appropriateness. Taking the cue from the ad, the students can group up to write a script and present a role-play. The process apart from integrating language skills also boosts the confidence of the students in terms of developing fluency in the target language.

They can also be shown the ending of an ad if it is a commercial and be asked to predict the beginning. Another activity could involve, muting the commercial and asking the students to draw inferences regarding making associations, drawing conclusions, predicting and hypothesizing. After they view the ad, they try to check their comprehension, evaluate, integrate their responses and associate the meaning to their personal values. The exercise has a potential to develop their listening skills and critical thinking skills. McGee and Fujita (2000) focused on the ability of commercials to enhance critical thinking skills.

We understand that an advertisement itself might not be very important in a classroom but what it does and can do remains significant. Its multidimensionality helps the student in various ways; tangible and intangible. The process

facilitates in applying the method of Bloom's Taxonomy which includes gaining knowledge (recollecting information), comprehending (understanding what is read), application (applying the comprehended input to situations), analysis (in terms of one's responses and influence on one's personality) synthesis (organizing the ideas) and evaluation (evaluating the outcome for personal contemplation). These aspects facilitate the student to respond to the ad in terms of language, comprehension of concepts and application (in this context- write-ups, speaking component, group discussion, presentation, role-play and so on). The last two also play a significant role in adding to the personality growth of the student.

As advertisements are also associated to pictures, the teacher can up with another activity that involves the process of writing and narrating a story. Each group is given a packet which contains a set of ads. The students study the pictures, the captions and the settings and try to generate a story using all the ads. What they come up with depends on their skills of comprehension and analysis and of course imagination. They are expected to combine the literal and literary aspects of language. Commercials are coupled with jingles and music and this component also interests students. They can write down the song and this would be an exercise in listening skills. A number of studies suggest (Davis, 1997; Lee, 1994) that students who are exposed to commercials improve their listening skills and augment their motivation to learn.

Students can also be asked to design their own ads and showcase them to the class. This could be done in the form of posters. This also kindles their imaginative and innovative capabilities. They can be given different 'products' of which they are expected to make advertisements (with a theme) including the caption and perform it to the class.

### Advertisements-Captions

As ads have a potential to sensitize students to language and literature, they can bring about positive attitudinal changes and widen the mental horizons of the students. Many thought provoking slogans like:

"Bond with the Best" (ad for Clothing) (alliteration, terseness)

"Be the Boss. Make the switch" (ad for a car) ((implied subject, alliteration, slang, and ambiguity)

"Wires that don't catch Fire" (ad for electric wires) (metaphor, collocation)

"Open Happiness" (ad for a soft drink) (denotation, connotation, word meaning, metaphor and deviation that breaks the rule of a collocation)

"Don't Blend in" (ad for a car) (imperative sentence, phrasal verbs)

"Power to You" (word play, you-attitude (making the receiver of the message the focus)

"Connecting People" (ad for a mobile phone) (literal and literary associations, brevity)

"Ambidexters" (ad for shoes with the brand name 'Dexter') (manipulation of the word 'ambidextrous' (one-word-

substitutes), pun)

"Utterly Butterly Delicious" (ad for a company that produces milk products) (rhyme, coinage, lexical deviation)

"Beauty outside. Beast inside" (ad for a software product) (antonyms, alliteration, metaphor)

"Outwit. Outplay. Outlast." (Ad for a T.V series) (Leadership, repetition, lexical applications)

“When there is no Tomorrow” ((ad for courier company) (philosophical interpretation),

“At the Heart of the Image” (ad for a camera) (connotation, personification)

“The Greatest Tragedy is Indifference” (ad of The Red Cross Society) (motivational, Grammar-degrees of comparison)

“Impossible is Nothing” (ad for shoes) (reversal for the sake of foregrounding, idiom, word play)

“Let Your Fingers do the Walking” (ad for ‘Yellow Pages’) (deviation, lexical breaking of the rule of collocation)

“Just Do It” (ad for shoes) (motivation, brevity).

The areas of focus have been mentioned in brackets but not limited to those because the seamless world of ads also expands the zones of the teaching –learning processes. Many of these captions can also be introduced as topics for debates, ‘Just a Minute’ and group discussions. Sometimes the ads pave the way for a more complex and critical understanding of the picture or visual. Social advertisements about racial integration, environmental protection, banning harmful drugs and so on also have a significant role to play. Apart from the language point of view, they also are forceful media of change and awareness among youth.

### **Cross-Cultural Aspects**

The advertisements also facilitate a peep into various cultures and practices prevalent in the world. The authentic material offers itself for further manipulations in the classroom regarding cultural and cross-cultural aspects. It facilitates a peep into various cultures and practices prevalent in the world. So the students can also be drawn to the importance of cultural understanding to learn a language. Aspects like non-verbal features in the message, appearance, accent (if it’s a video), pronunciation, setting, identity, human value and so on come into focus in this exercise. Sometimes there are artful deviations by the ad makers in which they make cultural swaps between two cultures in terms of language or dress. There are various commercials that we come across that reflect multicultural themes. These aspects call for some attention and the visual can be exploited in terms of language and culture. **Learning Styles**

Richard Felder the academic researcher, after extensive research has given forth students’ learning styles. They are seeing and hearing, reflecting and acting, reasoning logically and intuitively, analyzing and visualizing. A comprehension of these styles helps the teacher in accommodating and switching his/her own teaching methodologies. Through this activity the teacher can also gauge the learning patterns of the students which might to some extent be helpful in

An EFL classroom which is usually a mixed-ability class

([http://www4.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/users/f/felder/public/Learning\\_Styles.html](http://www4.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/users/f/felder/public/Learning_Styles.html))

### **Questions**

The teacher can also prepare a questionnaire for the students on a particular advertisement or commercial. Similarly students can also be encouraged to write questions and exchange them with other groups. Some questions are:

Analyze the caption in the advertisement.

What do you think is the human value in the ad?

Comment on the non-verbal features.

Do you disagree with any aspect in the ad? Why?

Can you use the same caption for another product?

What is it that you like about this commercial/? Why?

Identify the linguistic features in the caption.

What are the cultural aspects that interest you in the ad/commercial?

How do you think that this activity has helped you?

Write another caption for the ad/commercial.

How many word-groups can you make from the caption and the visual?

Many more areas of questioning can be generated by the teacher through this multidimensional platform. One of the most significant areas could be that of critical thinking which rests on clarity and precision to apply to logical problem- solving.

## CONCLUSIONS

A student in an EFL setting might at times feel that learning English is an insurmountable task. But aids like ‘advertisements’ do help the teacher and the taught. Thus they introduce subjects for debate(s), encourage conversations, help build vocabulary, motivate to guess and imagine. Analytical and creative areas of thinking are fostered. They prompt the student to use and improve the LSRW skills. Thus using advertisements and commercials in the English classroom is an effective method to reinforce the teaching-learning processes to transform and renew practice. An interesting pedagogical approach with plenitude of possibilities combining the visual and verbal aspects, it holds the potential to engage a student’s interest and motivation levels in not just learning a language but learning it better.

## NOTES

- “The term ‘stylistics’ or ‘linguistic stylistics’ has come to designate an analytic study of literature which uses the concepts and techniques of modern linguistics.” (Childs, Peter and Roger Fowler :2006: 229)According to Short (1996), “stylistics is the direct application of linguistic evidence to interpret and analyze literature, and is a general analytical tool that uses explanations of formal aspects” of literature. “to discuss meaning; lexical repetitions to strengthen the impact of a word and so on. The various aspects like phonology, vocabulary, discourse and grammar are explicated to relate students to the literary work.
- “Reader Response criticism of the 1970s and 1980s which highlighted the supremacy of readerly interpretation over authorial intention. (Childs, Peter and Roger Fowler: 2006: 123)”Rosenblatt (1978) emphasized the importance of the reader’s response towards the text. He opines that the unique individual’s background, emotions and ideas create meaning during a particular time and setting. He has placed reading on two levels; the *effereent stance* (reading for information) and the *aesthetic stance* (reading for pleasure).
- Sites like this (<http://www.visit4ads.com/>) and some more that can be found on the web offer video clippings of commercials and slogans of advertisements. Teachers will find them handy and useful for the classroom.

- Today's youth need to equip themselves with the nuances of communication skills. The national and multinational companies expect the right standards in communication and soft skills. So such activities in the classroom help the student to take part better in real-situations like facing interviews, group-discussions, delivering Presentations, conducting meetings, writing reports and so on.
- **Foregrounding:** It is a concept evolved by the pre-war Prague school of linguistics and poetics, under the influence of Russian formalist doctrines, to represent the abnormal use of a medium, its obtrusion against a background of 'automatic' responses, which is characteristic of much, if not all, artistic expression. In literature, foregrounding may be most readily identified with linguistic *deviation*: the violation of rules and conventions, by which a poet transcends the normal communicative resources of the language, and awakens readers, by freeing them from the grooves of cliché expression, to a new perceptivity. Poetic metaphor, a type of semantic deviation, is the most important instance of this type of foregrounding. (Childs, Peter and Roger Fowler: 2006: 90)

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